MARCH PROGRAMMES IN THE MANHATTAN PLAYHOUSES


MARY NASH IN "THE MAN WHO CAME BACK"


GRACE VALENTINE IN "JOHNNY GET YOUR GUN"


CHRYSTAL HERNE. THE NEW W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM COMEDY "OUR BETTER'S"


MARIE PECHEUR IN "OLD LADY 31" © by Ira Hill


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JEANNE EAGELS IN "THE PROFESSOR'S LOVE STORY"

By LAWRENCE REAMER.

THREE plays by actors in the course of a week is more than the usual allowance. E. H. Sothern, Maude Fulton and J. H. Benrimo, however, contributed the supply of new plays seen during the past week. It is almost as difficult to group the dramatic compositions of the actor as it is to classify them broadly under one generic term.

But there are qualities common to all the plays of actors. They are invariably gifted with arms. In fact, they are likely to consist altogether of arms which are in turn by way of being long and reaching out invariably for the coincidence which is such an essential part of dramatic success in the old fashioned play. And the plays of actors are almost certain to be old fashioned. Theatrical effectiveness rather than logical development, deference to art rather than nature and the exhibition of humor for its own sake rather than as an inevitable result of the character—these are some of the traits common to plays written by actors. It must not be forgotten that the plays of Arthur Wing Pinero, the despised Boucicault and George M. Cohan of his time, are the work of actors. Then there is always a prototype greater than any of them to whom all the playwrights of the ages since the golden Elizabethan days pay hyperlatria. Yet his are actor's plays.

A singular characteristic of these pieces is the attraction that the character of a writer possesses for them. Ignorant of the writer's arts and usually of the education that might make it possible for them to become men of letters without long years of preparation, yet the fascination of the literary worker is too strong for the actor to resist once he sets out to be an author.

Like the moth about the light, the actor as playwright flickers and flutters. This mysterious individual is so far removed from the play actor that nothing seems impossible to this character. The author may even take into his home a girl from the Night Court or set out to write a play with a guide at his elbow, and thus take his character out of life just as a cook goes to work with her recipe on the table and her ingredients in the kitchen dresser.

Of course, a man of letters would never seem so wonderful to any but an actor. But he serves as the hero of these two plays. In the case of Mr. Sothern it is surprising that even a literary hero should have frightened the dramatist out of all respect for illusion. After all, the sense of illusion is the life of the theatre, and without it any play is bound to fail of effectiveness on the stage, however amusing it may seem to the writer.

It is always agreeable to record the artistic progress of the cinema. We hear much of the genuine art influence at work in the fruitful field of the moving picture, although there are persons discerning enough in other departments of knowledge to believe that the advance in this popular form of diversion has so far been altogether scientific. The improvement in the technical means of the cinema is to these observers of the movie game its most notable feature.

Has there been any general advance in the character of the stories of these plays? Are the plots not as banal and stereotyped as ever and below the average of the melodramas that used to be played in the cheaper type of theatre? How, for instance, does the picture play exhibit any superiority over its prototype of the old Bowery days?

Of course, the reproduction of actual events which may be taken to include scenes of travel and interesting forms of industry are not included in the list of the photographed melodramas. But in order to gather some impression of the character of the weekly output of this kind of "art" it is necessary only to refer to the weekly journal which analyzes these recurring films with rough, if acute, critical genius.

One week would be as good as another. The supply of "art" varies little. It is interesting, however, to select the most recent of these masterpieces of the cinema art. Here is, for instance, an account of one:

"It is the tale of a woman transplanted from the simple social gayeties of a small town to New York by the man she married. She misses the little social functions, but he, engrossed in the struggle for success, sticks to his law books and fails to take his wife out into society. The result is that she becomes mixed in with one of the Bohemian sets and two men make a play for her. One is the son of her husband's employer and the other an elderly roue. The husband divorces her and she marries the employer's son. His father cuts him off and the boy takes to gambling for a living. Between wine, cards and a 'vamp' he soon goes to the devil entirely, despite the fact that his wife tries hard to save him. Finally the elderly roue, who has never given up the thought of winning the affection of the young wife, plants some money which the boy steals. The wife, learning of it, takes the money away from the husband and returns it. The 'vamp,' figuring a new method of blackmail that is as old as the hills, repairs to the apartment of the roue with the husband. The two break down the door, and the husband, egged on by the 'vamp,' demands $50,000 for his wife's stolen affections. There is a struggle and the roue is killed with a blow from a statuette. The husband then calls on the man that he succeeded as husband to the little country girl to get him out of the clutches of the law. He is acquitted on the strength of the plea that husband No. 1 makes, which shows up the little girl as black as possible. But later the ex-husband-lawyer overhears the talk between his lately acquitted client and the 'vamp' and sees with whom the fault lay. He then rushes to find the little girl whose headstrong desire for the lights and gayeties of New York's night life led her to wreck her happiness. The finish of the story is weak. The girl on leaving the courtroom wanders toward High Bridge and is about to commit suicide, but is rescued by one of the detectives in the employ of husband No. 1, and all ends happily with her resting in his arms. This is the sort of melodrama that the shop girls, &c., expect as an inner view of high social life, and as long as they want it and are willing to pay for it the picture producers might just as well turn it out. But as for advancing the screen art it won't go a very long way."

Here is more of the same:

"We have had the story before in many forms—that of a rich man's son who is disowned by his father because he refuses to abandon art for business. In this instance, however, the boy doesn't become a world-famous painter, but a common drunkard, eventually redeemed by the daughter of a dive-keeper on the Barbary Coast. Also in this instance the scenes depicting life in Frisco just prior to the earthquake rank with the best of that sort of motion picture work. The 'dive' stuff is so vivid that its realism is positively startling."

How elevating these may be to contemplate one may realize, yet there are still more of these recent contributions.

"Are Passions Inherited" has a sound that might suggest the sociological uplift that is so often promised. But read, mark, learn, but do not inwardly digest the following scenario:

"The story deals with a bad boy who beats his wife and is sent to jail for fifteen years, his wife dying and their child reared by a widow. The child inherits some of the bad in her father, with her life an up and down affair between good and bad. After a lapse of fifteen years she becomes a plant in a dance hall and barely escapes in several escapades. She meets a Westerner and is married, going to his ranch to live. She leaves him to return to her former haunts, and with a few more complications arising the thing comes to a satisfactory finish. The best portion of this production is the ranch stuff, which shows some typical Western life that still remains interesting. The picture has an abundance of action, being one continual fight."

Is there much improvement noticeable in the cinema described in these words, "The hero inherits a fortune from his father, who expresses in his will a wish that he become the husband of Vera Morton. The will specifies that Jack Ballantine settle down before he acquires the bulk of the inheritance. He tackles a business scheme, but that fails, taking with it $15,000. Later on he visits a prizefight and during a rough and tumble battle over the referee's decision Ballantine thinks he has killed the arbiter and rushes on a wild trip out of town. The train is held up by bandits and Ballantine wades through the lot, knocking them senseless as fast as they come, finally disappearing when he sees the sheriff, who, he imagines, is after him. The action continues right through the balance of the picture, with Ballantine battling right and left, knocking opponents hither and thither until finally the complications are adjusted when Jane comes into his life. Jack settles down after saving her from a gang of roughnecks." And so it goes. Here is the last and possibly the best of them all:

"A peasant girl dancer is discovered by a duke, who takes her to Petrograd to attend a ballet school. The girl is set up in a beautiful home with her mother, the duke meeting all bills. Her progress in the dancing line is rapid and she is prepared to make her debut when her mother dies. The duke is most attentive, but the girl falls in love with an artist. Her brother while visiting her charges her with being the duke's mistress. The girl is upset over this state of affairs, but secures the return of her brother's confidence in her by introducing him to the artist as the man she is to marry. The duke, upon hearing of her love affair, is greatly enraged and has the artist arrested. The girl makes her debut as a danseuse and wins immediate favor. Her lover, however, is sentenced to Siberia and she gives up all to go with him, his release being promised by a prince with whom the girl is friendly. The duke in the meantime had been killed by her brother, who found him ill treating his sister."

These are not "shockers" put on the market by irresponsible companies, but the average weekly supply of the cinema. There are undoubtedly various highly meritorious technical details to be observed in the revelation of these stories. Doubtless there are beautiful pictures and graceful poses of the characters probably abound. But of "art"? Is there a discenible trace of it. From the contemplation of the picture plays described here, there could result only a certain form of diversion. And that form could not possibly be made to bear any relation to art by the most enthusiastic admirer of the cinema.

SHEEP FOR "THE WANDERER."

Their Training an Important Part of the Spectacle.

It is no reflection on the extraordinary cast of players assembled for "The Wanderer" at the Manhattan Opera House to say that one of the biggest hits of the show is scored by the sheep. There are nearly 120 sheep employed in the first act and to train these lamb chops on the hoof was the most gigantic task ever encountered by Dr. Martin J. Potter, the famous animal expert who provides animals for all the shows in town. Dr. Potter has furnished elephants for the Hippodrome, lions for Coney Island, cows for rural plays, horses for "Ben Hur," chickens for "Way Down East," donkeys for "Carmen" at the Metropolitan Opera House and various other four footed actors during the period covering the last twenty-five years, but until "The Wanderer" was produced he had never furnished sheep for any production.

"And training these sheep was the toughest job I ever tackled," said the "Doc" last week at the Manhattan. "The trouble with sheep is that they haven't any sense. The blamed things have no minds or brains. The old expression about sheep following a leader didn't turn out to be true in this case. I furnished one old ram who was led across the stage in the belief that all the other sheep would follow him—and what did the blamed things do? They stampeded at the first rehearsal. Three of them jumped over the footlights. One of them spoiled a perfectly good bass drum by falling into it and another fool thing jumped off a platform forty feet high and broke its neck. All the stage hands had nice fresh lamb chops the next day and it didn't cost them a cent either. Honestly, the way those sheep behaved made me almost lose my temper, but I persevered and finally we got them real quiet.

"But when it came to dress rehearsal the darned things broke loose again. Finally the only thing we could do was to fence them in, build scenery along the edge of the runway on which they came down the side of the hill, put a couple of dogs behind them to make them go fast and then lead the old ram across the stage. After that it was easy. There was no place for the sheep actors to go but forward. If they turned around and tried to go back the dogs would bark, and in this way we finally taught the blamed things that all we wanted them to do was to go straight across the stage and make a quick exit. It was the toughest thing I ever tried to do—to train these spring lambs."

It takes seven motor trucks to take the sheep to and from the Manhattan Opera House from the stables on Thirty-eighth street, where "Doc" Potter quarters his four footed actors. There is a law in New York which prohibits driving sheep through the streets. Otherwise "Doc" Potter would drive his flock down Eighth avenue and turn into the stage door on Thirty-fifth street. Instead of that the automobile trucks are used. The sheep are packed in like sardines every night at 7:30 and are transported to the stage door. There the keeper rings in on the time clock and reports to the doorman "No sheep missing to-night" and then takes the actors inside of the theatre.

The sheep are used only three minutes, parading across the stage according to schedule and then are driven into corral in the corner, loaded on the waiting auto trucks and sent back to the stables. They are fed three times a day. They have nice comfortable quarters to sleep in, and altogether are probably the best behaved and best trained actors in New York. They don't have to worry about getting slaughtered; there is no danger of their being sent to feed the army in France; they are sure of a nice, warm, prosperous winter and in nearly every way these four footed actors are having a much nicer time than many a cold and hungry thespian walking Broadway.

A PLAY A WEEK HERE.

IRVING PLACE—"Im Clubsessel" (In the Easy Chair) will be the novelty offered by the German repertory players on Wednesday evening. Other plays will be "Das Grosse Licht" Monday, "Armut" Tuesday and "Hoheit tanzt Walzer" Thursday.

BRONX OPERA HOUSE—"Captain Kidd, Jr., from the Cohan & Harris Theatre, with Edith Taliaferro, Zelda Sears, Adele Rolland, Otto Kruger, Ernest Stallard and others of the original company, will be the attraction.

STANDARD—"The Yellow Jacket," the Coburn production of the Hazelton-Benrimo play from a season at the Cort and Harris theatres, will be given at the upper Broadway playhouse for the week.

THE WEEK'S NEW PLAY.

W. Somerset Maugham's New Comedy at the Hudson Theatre.

W. Somerset Maugham, who has given the English and American stage during the past ten years "Lady Frederick," "Jack Straw" and "Mrs. Dot," has written a new comedy entitled "Our Betters," which for three acts satirizes the tuft hunters of England and America and especially those Americans who have gone abroad, whether to London or to the Continent, to marry titles at any cost. John D. Williams will produce Mr. Maugham's comedy at the Hudson Theatre to-morrow night. The American colony in London, made up of socially ambitious men and women who have expatriated themselves and whose only code is "If at first you don't succeed, climb, climb again," is the group of characters that Mr. Maugham employs in his play. They are all modelled from life. There are good Americans in this colony as well as bad ones, fine English people along with wastrels; the exposition of these characters is said to be sharp, but for the representation is claimed extraordinary truth; the wisdom of sound morals is reaffirmed by the exhibition of bad morals.

Mr. Maugham's "Our Betters" is a comedy of characters—a quite literal transcript of an absurd but accidentally important group of artificial people whom a special environment has clothed with more manner than manners. All of the women characters are of American origin. They have gone abroad or have been sent by their wealthy parents to marry titles and thereby whitewash their American beginnings. One of these titled women is visited by her younger sister, who has gone to duplicate her "big sister's" career, and if possible marry an earl, since her sister only married a lord. The girl, quite fine of nature, is then introduced into this artificial group. She meets the young nobleman who has been marked out for her; high social life abroad is revealed to her as she had never expected, and without much qualification one sees what happens to *Miss Hodgson of Chicago* and *Miss Saunders of New York* when after a brilliant American coming out she buys a title and lives abroad.

NEWMAN TRAVELTALK

PEKIN—E. M. Newman visited Pekin last summer, and in his traveltalk to be given this evening and to-morrow afternoon at Carnegie Hall he will review his impressions with the aid of motion and still pictures of the ancient city and its wonders.

Current Productions.

Astor, "Her Soldier Boy"; Bandbox, "The Lodger"; Belasco, "Little Lady in Blue"; Booth, "A Successful Calamity"; Bramhall, "Keeping Up Appearances"; Casino, "You're In Love"; Century, "The Century Girl"; Cohan, "Come Out of the Kitchen"; Cohan & Harris, "The Willow Tree"; Comedy, the Washington Square Players; Cort, "Upstairs and Down"; Criterion, "Johnny Get Your Gun"; Eltinge, "Cheating Cheaters"; Empire, "A Kiss for Cinderella"; Forty-eighth Street, "The 13th Chair"; Fulton, "Pals First"; Gaiety, "Turn to the Right"; Garrick, "Stranger Than Fiction," Globe, "The Harp of Life"; Harris, "The Brat"; Hippodrome, "The Big Show"; Hudson, "Our Betters"; Irving Place, German repertory; Knickerbocker, "The Professor's Love Story"; Liberty, "Have a Heart"; Little, "The Morris Dance"; Longacre, "Nothing But the Truth"; Lyceum, "The Great Divide"; Manhattan Opera House, "The Wanderer"; Morosco, "Canary Cottage"; Maxine Elliott's, "Magic" and "The Little Man"; New Amsterdam, "Miss Springtime"; Playhouse, "The Man Who Came Back"; Princess, "Oh, Boy!"; Republic, "Lilac Time"; Shubert, "Love o' Mike"; Thirty-ninth Street, "Old Lady 31"; Winter Garden, "Show of Wonders."

Motion Pictures—Broadway, "The Barrier"; Lyric, "The Honor System"; Forty-fourth Street, Geraldine Farrar in "Joan the Woman"; Park, "The Crisis."


CLIFTON CRAWFORD and ADELE ROWLAND in "HER SOLDIER BOY" ASTOR THEATRE


LOUIS BENNISON, BILLIE SCOTT and JANE CARLTON in "JOHNNY GET YOUR GUN"


ANNA WHEATON, and HAL FORDE, in "OH, BOY"